

Merritt Parkway, Taconic Road Bridge  
Spanning Taconic Road at the 6.34 mile mark  
Greenwich  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-71

HAER,  
CONN,  
1-GREW1,  
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
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HAER  
CONN,  
1 - GREENWICH,  
12 -

# **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

## **Merritt Parkway, Taconic Road Bridge**

HAER No. CT-71

**Location:** Spanning Taconic Road at the 6.34 mile mark in Greenwich, Fairfield County, Connecticut  
UTM: 18.616665.4549450  
Quad: Stamford, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1937

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** M. A. Gammino Construction Company  
Providence, Rhode Island

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Taconic Road

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In July 1640 Daniel Patrick and Robert Feake, as agents of the New Haven Colony, purchased all lands between the Assmick and Potommuck brooks from local Indians. To protect their settlement Patrick and Feake signed allegiance to the Dutch at New Amsterdam, in 1642. Two years later, the Dutch raised a 130-man army and defeated the Petuquapean Indians at the site of the present village of Cos Cob in Greenwich.<sup>1</sup>

In 1650, a treaty was signed that defined the boundary line between Connecticut and New Amsterdam, removing Greenwich from Dutch control. Six years later, Greenwich again came under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony and started to prosper. In the next century, farmers settled throughout the almost fifty square miles of Greenwich. By 1756, there were nine districts in the town: Greenwich, Old Town, Horseneck, Cos Cob, North Street, Peckslan, Round Hill, Quaker Ridge, Stanwich, and Glenville. Trade with New York City prospered as ports developed at Cos Cob and the mouth of the Mianus River. The shoe-making industry developed at Banksville and Stanwich.<sup>2</sup>

With the arrival of the railroad in 1848, Greenwich commenced to change. The train reduced the time required to get to New York City. The town flourished as more and more New Yorkers traveled to Connecticut, seeking a haven from the noise and pollution of the city. By the 1920s, Greenwich was a well-established commuter suburb.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Development of Old Greenwich." Greenwich Press, 17 October 1935, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>William E. Finch, "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town," (Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Finch, 6.

As farms gave way to residential homes, traffic continued to increase on the Post Road/U.S. Route 1. Local residents soon sought an alternative to the dangerous old highway. When Commissioner Macdonald suggested building an alternative road, Greenwich's residents quickly adhered to the idea. But conflicts developed as it came time to determine a specific route.

Originally eight different plans were put forth. This eventually became a contest between two routes. Macdonald wanted a northern route going through Round Hill, North Street, and Stanwich (this become known as the Greenwich Loop). Local residents, including Highway Superintendent P. L. Minor, wanted a more southerly route through Pecksland. They felt this route would be more convenient, less expensive to build and necessary in the near future. Furthermore, local leaders preferred destroying the lower valued properties along the Pecksland route than disrupting wealthy estates to the north. Macdonald threatened to start construction at the east end of the parkway to gain support for his plan. With this obstacle out of the way, work began at the New York state line on June 1, 1934.<sup>4</sup>

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Taconic Road starts at North Street just south of the Merritt Parkway and proceeds north through Stanwich to the New York state line. The John Arborio Construction Company of Poughkeepsie, NY, received the contract to grade the Merritt from Round Hill Road to Taconic

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<sup>4</sup>"Macdonald Sees No Road Solution," Greenwich Press, 10 September 1931, p. 1.

"Highway Superintendent Minor Proposes Southern Route," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 1.

"Proposed Routes For the Merritt Highway," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 8.

"Route Goes Through Round Hill, Residents Upset," Greenwich Press, 24 March 1932, p. 1.

"400 Hear Cross and Macdonald Discuss Highway," Greenwich Press, 16 November 1933, p. 1.

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Road, in Greenwich (ConnDot project #180-14). While the Taconic Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the M. A. Gammino Construction Company of Providence, RI (ConnDot project #180-39).<sup>5</sup> The bridge cost \$61,953 and was completed in 1937. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Round Hill Road to Taconic Road. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project #180-91). The Taconic Road Bridge has received little maintenance since it was built. Over the years small patches of spalling concrete have been removed and replaced.<sup>6</sup>

#### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Taconic Road Bridge is a single-span, reinforced-concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge spanning 55'-6". Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge at a skew of 20°-25' and a 4.133 percent grade, with a clear roadway of 64'.

The rigid-frame design for the Taconic Road Bridge differs from most of the other bridges on the Merritt Parkway because it is shaped like a segmental arch, instead of an arched beam, supported on walls. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid frame.) The walls, which are the frame legs, are exposed several feet above the roadway. The year 1936 is carved into the face of the leg.<sup>7</sup> The arch rises 19' from the springline to the crown. The walls are a constant thickness of 3'-6", but the arch tapers to 2' at the

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<sup>5</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>6</sup>Taconic Road Bridge, DOT #698; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

<sup>7</sup>The year carved into the bridge does not correspond with the completion date of the bridge.

crown. The spandrels of the arch are filled with gravel and bounded by reinforced-concrete walls at the faces. A 3" setback from the face of the arch to the spandrel face and 2" chamfers along the arch edges delineate the structural frame of the bridge.

A construction joint occurs between the rigid-frame and the wing walls. Tapered pylons, shaped in plan like half octagons, are part of the wing walls. The Connecticut coat of arms is on the inside of the northeast pylon. The poured-in-place balustrade breaks at the inside of the pylons for expansion. Presently, the railing is spalling, and a metal W-rail (guardrail) has been added inside the concrete railings. Another joint occurs between the footings and the wing walls, that are counterforted to support 34' of fill. The bedrock under the bridge slopes down from west to east. The west leg of the frame bears in a notch cut in the bedrock. The west wing wall bears on footings to distribute the load over the bedrock. The east leg and the east wing wall bear on footings that are supported on square piers to carry the load to the bedrock.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Finch, William E. "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town." Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File.

Greenwich Press. 1931-1935.

----- . Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

----- . Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.